



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE AESTHETIC CATEGORIES.

THE term beauty is sometimes taken very broadly so as to cover the entire field of aesthetic excellence, as by Croce and Carritt.¹ But this use stretches it far beyond its normal meaning; it is better to recognize other coordinate terms for aesthetic excellence. The most notable of these supplementary terms is the sublime. To these the tragic and the comic are often added. Even these will scarcely suffice if we are to find an appropriate category for the genre paintings of Teniers or the novels of Dickens.

If our analysis were to move in the plane of literary usage, the categories would multiply beyond control. Beauty would need to be distinguished from charm, loveliness, delicacy, elegance, splendor, and many such terms; sublimity would invite a comparison with grandeur, impressiveness, and the like. We should encounter a tangle of synonyms leading to endless discriminations in the manner of Prodicus. Let us then abandon the dictionary method, and seek some more definite instrument of classification.

The aesthetic field varies in many ways and is subject to multiple classification. But one of the most important ways in which it varies is in its appeal to specific human instincts. Let us take as our guide the analysis of human instincts worked out by McDougall and refined upon by Thorndike. In this paper I shall assume that the reader is familiar with the views expressed in McDougall's *Social*

¹ B. Croce, *Aesthetics*, ch. XII; E. F. Carritt, *Theory of Beauty*, ch. IX.

Psychology, which I shall follow, without, however, impugning the validity of Thorndike's more minute analysis; for psychology it may be necessary to split up such an instinct as fear into more specific fears of this and that, but for aesthetics the broader grouping would in any case remain more significant. Our task then is to consider the phases of aesthetic experience as they appeal to the various instincts and propensities of our nature, and to correlate this analysis with the traditional categories.²

First of all it should be noticed that there is a formal factor in aesthetic experience which makes little or no appeal to any instinct. This factor is dominant in non-pictorial designs, including Oriental rugs (when their symbolism is unknown or unheeded), jewelry in geometrical patterns, and stained glass (in cases where the representative element is negligible); it is also dominant in those musical compositions in which the emotional effect is minimal or absent, and an abstract pattern of agreeable tones is presented. To be sure a fairly plausible case can be made out for the doctrine that there is no purely abstract design for eye or ear—a line would always be an emotional gesture or a suggestion of the beloved lady's neck, while beauty of sound would be an echo of her voice or else of the shouts of victory. However, the relations of instincts to abstract design and abstract music are subtle and dubious, while our preferences in this field are immediate and vigorous. It seems safer to admit that the function of instinct in these cases is a vanishing quantity. Their beauty lies in their harmony with our senses and with our perceptive processes. Hildebrand and Cornelius have elaborated a theory of the ways in which perception is facilitated by good design; the same can be shown of the musical composer's devices of repetition, variation, contrast, and climax. Our first cate-

² Cf. the analogous ethical problem worked out by Prof. W. K. Wright in "The Evolution of Values from Instincts," *Philosophical Review*, XXIV, 1915, pp. 166-183.

gory then shall be sensory-perceptual beauty—or, if you like, formal beauty, involving little or no appeal to instinct.

There is no denying that the beauty of human beings is intimately related to sex, but the precise nature and scope of the relation is debatable. Both sexes are most beautiful at the age when they would most naturally woo or be wooed, and in those conditions of health and freedom from strain which are most propitious to wooing. There is a reciprocal relation between beauty and sex attraction. A woman's charm is enhanced by the abstract beauty of her form, coloring, and voice; it would be absurd to maintain that if all women looked like Hille Bobbe in Franz Hals's picture and spoke with strident voices, their attractive power would be no whit lessened. Conversely the beauty of painting, sculpture, and poetry is enhanced by incorporating sexually attractive features; it would be nonsense to assert that Botticelli's Venus or Keats' last sonnet would be as beautiful to sexless beings as they are to us. Our second category then shall be formal beauty enriched by sexual charm.

Another instinct which enriches aesthetic experience is the parental instinct with its concomitant tender emotion. No object is more fascinating to a mother than her child. She is enraptured by its tender and delicately tinted skin, its dainty little hands and feet. The impulse, being a protective and solicitous one, finds a charm in the very helplessness and fragility of its object. This delight in tenderness, delicacy, and fragility spreads into the aesthetic sphere. As McDougall says, 'It is amusing to observe how, in those women in whom the instinct is strong, it is apt to be excited, owing to the subtle working of similarity, by any and every object that is small and delicate of its kind—a very small cup or chair, or book, or what not.' (*Social Psychology*, p. 74.) The fact that the taste for smallness and delicacy in artistic objects is more marked in women

than in men confirms its relation to the parental instinct, which is primarily maternal rather than paternal. The beauty of flowers and birds, of fragile Chinese porcelain and Venetian glass, and of fine-spun tracery in Gothic windows, owes much to this protective impulse. Our third category then shall be formal beauty enriched by the parental instinct with its tender emotion.

There is no incompatibility between the two preceding. Rather they tend to go together. In practical life, as McDougall has emphasized, sex attraction normally evokes also the tender and protective impulse. Similarly in plastic art and poetry the ideal of feminine beauty tends to include a delicacy or even a fragility that appeals to the protective impulse. Botticelli's Venus rising from the sea unites the appeals of sex and childlike tenderness, but the baleful flower-clad figure in his "Spring" appeals to sex alone. In Wagner's Tannhaeuser the charms of Elizabeth and Venus differ in the same way. Formal beauty may therefore be enriched by sex and tenderness together, or by either alone.

One further impulse needs to be aroused by all forms of beauty properly so-called—namely that of self-abasement. Without a tinge of humility the sense of beauty is incomplete. When it is absent we call the object merely pretty, not beautiful. A doll-like face may have sensory-perceptual agreeableness of color and form, but in default of individuality, depth of character, novelty or subtlety, it will seem empty or trivial. The faces that appear on the covers of cheap magazines are pretty—perfect in contour and complexion, with liquid eyes rolled in a sentimental appeal to sex and tenderness, but devoid of the depth and subtlety which alone can command the deference of the discriminating. These faces appeal to the *undiscriminating* public—which also makes no distinction between "beauty" and "prettiness" in its praises.

There are various means by which the object can command our deference. The suggestion of a rich inner life may do it, as the poise of the Venus of Melos, the reverie of the Hermes of Praxiteles, the subtlety of Mona Lisa, the vital exuberance of Rubens's bacchanalian figures. Preciousness may do it, as in silk, gems, marble, and porphyry, in contrast with cotton, paste, and plaster. So may delicacy of workmanship, as in intricate carving and lace.³

This need of humility involves a slight reinterpretation of our category of formal beauty. It is formal in that there need be no depiction or suggestion of the object of any instinct, yet the fact of rarity, the suggestion of skill, or the impression of subtlety may serve to evoke humility.

The impulses of self-assertion and of fear both enter into the sense of sublimity. The former, however, is the primary factor, while the latter gives it a special tone by putting it to the supreme test. When the forces of nature terrify us so that we can think only of our own fear, we have no sense of sublimity, and the situation is a practical evil not an aesthetic good. It is only by imaginatively identifying ourselves with these forces and adopting their power as our own that we feel exalted and call the object sublime. The steep and gloomy mountain side, resisting the climber and threatening him with disaster if he fall, is sublime to us if, instead of being cowed by it, we read into it pride and strength and inhumanity, and exult in appropriating these to ourselves.⁴

Tragedy is the dramatic form of the sublime. Its central feature is the struggle of the hero with hostile forces; to these in most cases he succumbs, but only because it would have required more than human power to resist them. We

³ Cf. what Santayana says of gems and of skilled workmanship in his *Sense of Beauty*, pp. 212, 213.

⁴ Cf. Lipps, *Asthetik*, Vol. I, p. 527 ff.; Santayana, *Sense of Beauty*, sect. 60).

are exalted by the hero's display of personal force, with which we sympathize and identify ourselves. The experience is rendered "a fearful joy" by the sense of impending or actual disaster, which, however, intensifies the element of self-assertion by straining it to the limit. Since tragedy involves struggle, our pugnacity is also brought into play, and wins a vicarious satisfaction.

The category of the comic is also connected with self-assertion and sometimes with fear. In spite of the violent contrast between the sublime and the ridiculous, the fact that it is but a step from the one to the other is so obvious as to be crystallized into a proverb. In both cases we find self-assertion contrasted with something formidable. In the sublime and the tragic, self-assertion is stimulated by a supreme test; in the comic it is liberated by the collapse of its opponent. Jokes are almost always "on" somebody or something, a weakness or defect of the victim being neatly shown up. It is still difficult to give a better account of our sense of the ridiculous than Hobbes's description of laughter—"sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others or with our own formerly."⁵ Freud has given an illuminating supplement to this by showing how the process of self-discipline and social discipline leaves us full of latent hostilities to convention and to all persons and forces which lay claim to our deference. An easy victory to some aspect of the self is given by the humiliation of the pompous, the betrayal of stupidity, the subjection of solemn thoughts to verbal jugglery.

The relation of the sublime and the comic to formal

⁵ Human Nature, ch. IX, sect. 14. Thorndike objects to this that it does not account for the happy laughter of playing children. But this too is usually evoked by some facile triumph—scuffing through autumn leaves, catching the opponent at tag, knocking down the tower of blocks, *cf.* H. M. Kallen, "The Aesthetic Principle in Comedy," *American Journal of Psychology*, XXII, 1911, pp. 137-157.

beauty demands consideration. Shall we say that the sublime is formless and the comic deformed? In many cases this seems to be true. Sublime mountain scenery is formless as compared with a geometrically ordered garden. The stars would be less sublime if reduced to a wallpaper pattern—or even to a religious motto.⁶ In literature, however, the sublime usually has a high degree of formal beauty. This is true of the descriptions of God's power over nature in the Book of Job, the favorite passages in *Paradise Lost*, the song of the archangels in the prologue of Goethe's *Faust*. In painting, Michael Angelo's Creation of Adam has formal beauty as well as sublimity. It seems then that the sublime may dispense with formal beauty; indeed it may derive power from rendering perception difficult⁷ (consider the starry sky) just as beauty derives charm from rendering perception easy; but in other cases it may form a splendid union with beauty. Burke recognized this union but did not dwell on it, and the names of "specious" or "fine" which he assigned to it were scarcely well chosen.

In the comic a similar situation emerges. Deformity is one of its sources; but in so far as this means merely departure from type it does not necessarily impair aesthetic unity: the Goops are as coherent as a correctly drawn human figure. Still I cannot think of any comic picture that could be called really beautiful. In literature the comic is compatible with a high degree of beauty, as in the witty speeches of Shakespeare's comedies, and in such verse as Lyly's lyric beginning "Cupid with my Campaspe played." The opera "Don Pasquale" envelops a farcical action in delicate and sprightly music; the product has exquisite beauty.

⁶ Cf. Santayana, *Sense of Beauty*, p. 105.

⁷ Cf. Bosanquet's distinction of facile and triumphant beauty in the third of his "Three Lectures on Aesthetics."

The beautiful, the sublime, the tragic, the comic—these are the aesthetic categories most frequently discussed. Yet it is astonishing how much of the aesthetic realm falls outside them all. Genre paintings are ordinarily neither beautiful nor sublime, yet they have a value which is assuredly aesthetic rather than theoretical or practical. Romantic novels like Scott's are too diffuse for beauty and are tragic only in spots. Dickens is comic at times but that does not sum up his whole aesthetic value. We need a category that demands less concentrated coherence than beauty, less tension than sublimity; otherwise we shall be at a loss in dealing with a large field of aesthetic experience. The best term which occurs to me is "the interesting," which can well indicate an appeal to miscellaneous interests. Fiction and genre painting offer a vivid and sympathy-awaking depiction of miscellaneous aspects of life; this depiction appeals to similarly miscellaneous interests in us, and is therefore called interesting. To this category nothing is therefore called interesting. To this category nothing human is foreign.

"Greift nur hinein in's volle Menschenleben;

 Und wo ihr's packt, da ist's interessant."⁸

This does not mean, however, that one subject matter is just as good as another, for even Goethe's "lustige Person" would scarcely deny that interests vary in the profundity of their appeal and also in their adaptability to aesthetic treatment.

If there be a primitive tendency to the sympathetic induction of emotion it would appear to be involved in almost the whole field of the interesting. By sympathy here I mean the tendency to share the feelings and attitudes displayed by others. It would account for the fascination ex-

⁸ *Faust, Vorspiel auf dem Theater.*

erted by narratives of human adventure and emotion, and would furnish the medium through which all our various instincts may be evoked. In practice sympathy tends to be limited to members of the same group. It has its counterpart in antipathy to intruders and to all beings which are suspected of hostility to the group; as regards them we delight in their distress and are perturbed at their delight, and their mere presence is a source of uneasiness. Antipathy too has an aesthetic function, for it may enhance our excitement and interest—the villain adds much to the play; but a work in which all the important characters are repellent is almost sure to be repellent itself.

Curiosity too plays a large role in the category of interest. Suspense of plot arouses it strongly; the desire “to see how it will come out” is much exploited in fiction and drama. The local color of voyages and historical novels appeals to curiosity, and the varieties of human character do so in an even higher degree.

Sympathy and curiosity then are fairly pervasive factors in the field of “the interesting” and help to give it unity.

On the borderline between interest and beauty lie works which lack the clear pattern of a lyric or a Greek tragedy, and make a strong appeal to varied interests, yet achieve beauty by a pervasive unity of fascinating atmosphere. Such are the Homeric epics, where the music of the verse, the nobility of sentiment, and the facility of the imagery create a charming unified atmosphere. Similarly in our own day Joseph Conrad adds beauty to interest; his style bathes a whole story in an atmosphere which is

“Simple, sensuous, passionate.”

It is worth considering whether the opposites of the categories so far considered have any positive character. Beauty, at least, has a positive counterpart in ugliness.

One factor in ugliness is the antithesis of sensory-perceptual beauty: certain combinations of color or of sound seem to be fundamentally at odds with our perceptive apparatus; certain modes of design resist perception, as did the atrocities of the so-called *art nouveau*. Another source of ugliness is disgust, which McDougall regards as one of the primary instincts. Whatever is filthy or morbid tends to arouse this response; it will always be difficult to secure beauty in the depiction of dungheaps or disease. If antipathy is a primitive tendency it should be mentioned here. Whether primitive or not the sentiment of aversion to what is foreign is early and strongly developed. The foreigner is distrusted and disliked—though a specific taboo may make the guest sacred. Hence divergence from the facial and bodily type of one's own group is normally regarded as ugly. The cripple and the idiot are revolting in a different and more profound way because they are alien to humanity—yet not so alien as not to claim human rights. Under the influence of humanitarian ideals we may inhibit this antipathy but I imagine that very few can altogether get rid of it. The positive character of ugliness, which distinguishes it from mere absence of beauty, seems to be due in its various instances to one or more of the factors just mentioned: harshness to sense or perception, a tendency to evoke disgust or a tendency to evoke antipathy.

The sublime, the tragic, and the comic have no positive antitheses; we find merely the non-sublime, the non-tragic, the non-comic. Interest, however, seems to find a positive antithesis in dullness (personified by Pope as a goddess). A series or complex of stimuli, without excellence of form and without power to awake any particular instinct, produces languor, fatigue, or restlessness; thus dullness produces boredom and wins a positive status.

Our attempt to trace the influence of the various instincts on the aesthetic experience leads to the following

results. We have found a significant subdivision of the category of beauty, contrasting formal beauty with that which is colored by sex or tenderness, and noting the role of humility in marking off beauty from mere prettiness. In regard to the sublime and the comic we have emphasized the role of self-assertion, without minimizing the distinction between the tension of sublimity and the *détente* of the comic. In the tragic we have recognized a dramatic form of the sublime, in which our pugnacity also makes itself felt. Furthermore we have felt the need of a supplementary category, "the interesting" which appeals, chiefly through sympathy and curiosity, to an unlimited variety of interests. On the negative side we have found a positive basis for ugliness in harshness to sense or perception, and in the instincts of disgust and antipathy, while a positive basis for dullness appears in fatigue.

If the preceding train of thought led merely to a new classification it would scarcely be worth the trouble. But I think it has a positive value in showing how the aesthetic realm is responsive to our vital interests, so that our aesthetic experience becomes a precious supplement and reinforcement to the other activities of life.

ALBERT R. CHANDLER.

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY.